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**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Dave Reimers
Mary Clark
Iowa Department for the Blind
5-6-2011**

Mary Clark: This is Mary Clark and I'm interviewing Dave Reimers today. We are meeting at the Iowa Department for the Blind down town Des Moines. The date is May 6, 2011. The time is approximately ten minutes to five. And, I know

Dave from the Orientation Center when he was a student in the Center, and I was teaching in the Center at the time. Dave do I have permission to interview you?

Dave Reimers: Yes.

Clarke: All right. I believe early on in life you had Diabetes. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Reimers: Sure. I guess, the story of my blindness probably started when I was diagnosed with Diabetes at the age of eight-years-old. And, when you're eight-years-old you don't think a whole lot about complications down the road. You just want to try to be as normal as possible, and be like all your friends and all your kids. But, as I grew older and grew into being a teenager and young adult, I knew that that was a possibility; that I could lose my sight some day along with other complications that could take place. And, that's exactly what happened.

At the age of about 25 I started having some problems with my sight. I noticed floaters, which was caused by bleeding vessels in the back of my eye. I went and had a series of laser treatments. In those days, laser treatments were not probably as good or as refined as they are today. Now, we're talking about 1982 or '83, somewhere in there; so it was a while ago. And, the laser treatments worked for a while first in my right eye then in my left, but as time went on the lasers; more vessels grew in the back of my eye and started to bleed. And, with Diabetic Retinopathy, which was what I was diagnosed with, the vessels actually attach to the back of your eye. They attach to your retina and start pulling them off, and that's what happened to me. So, I had

to go have a surgical procedure called a vitrectomy, which in 1984 is when I had that done; first in my right eye and then in my left. It was a much more complicated procedure than it is today. It usually meant that you spent at least a week in the hospital undergoing treatment, and so forth. And, the one in my right eye did work. I have some vision out of my right eye. I see about 2500 out of my right eye. My left eye did not work, so I have no vision out of my left eye. And, as a result of that, I have a prosthetic in my left eye, which is called an ocular shell. And, the purpose for that is for cosmetic reasons, and it also actually holds my eye lids open, because the actual eye ball has atrophied. And, without the ocular shell my eye would be shut, the left eye would be shut all the time. So, that's one reason why I have that.

So, I was working a job at the time. I was working at a place called Orchard place in the South side of Des Moines, working with youth when my sight started to go. I hoped that I could go back to work after my surgery. Even after the surgery in my left eye failed and my right eye was only 2500. I thought I could still do the job I was doing at that time. I had a Counselor here at the Department for the Blind assigned to me, her name was Marge Dreischer. And, she came out and did a work assessment at my job site and determined that I probably could go back to work. And, I tried that for a while, but for liability reasons the employer decided that it probably would not be a safe environment for me or the children if I continued my work there, so I was let go.

And, for a long time I wasn't sure really what I wanted to do. Marge kept urging me to go into the Orientation Center, and I resisted for quite a while, probably almost a

year, before I decided to go in. And, I finally made the decision one day when I was sitting at home watching soap operas; and decided that these are pretty good, and that's not me. I'm not a person that sits around and watches TV. So, I called Marge and said, "Okay, I'm going to give this a try." And, I entered the Orientation Center for the newly blind here at the Department for the Blind in the fall of 1985; I think it was September of 1985. And, I was actually in the Orientation Center from September to the following June of 1986.

Clark: After you left the Center then, did you look for work again, or what happened?

Reimers: While I was in the Center, actually, I learned about a program through Drake University; which is a program where you can get a Master's Degree in...actually I was going to get a Master's Degree in Education, but the emphasis of the degree was job development and job placement in working with people with disabilities. And, I thought that might be something I'd really like to do. It was a Master's Degree program that was actually paid by the government at the time. It sounded like a good deal to me, so I went and applied for that program. It was a program where they only take 15 students a year. And, you actually had to interview in front of a committee before you could be admitted. And, I did that and I was accepted. So, after I left the Orientation Center in June I had about two and a half months off for the summer. And, then that following fall of 1986 I enrolled, or I started classes full-time, to get my Master's Degree from Drake. And, I completed that the following year in August of 1987.

Clark: Did you use any particular additional materials, like for example, did you use books on tape, or did you use Braille at the time?

Reimers: When I was in school?

Clark: Yes.

Reimers: Yes, I did. I obviously can not read text books so all the text books were provided to me. Actually, they were already on file here at the library at the Department for the Blind, because there had been other students or other people who were blind who actually went through that Master's degree program. So, the books were already on tape, with the exception of a couple, which they taped for me. So, I used books on tape for books. And, to take notes in lecture classes I would take a tape recorder with me and tape the lectures, and then I would go home and play them back and highlight them, or type up the ones that I thought...or the areas of the lecture that I thought were important to know. Even though I couldn't read what I was typing by typing it, it reemphasized to me that there was something I needed to remember, and it made it easier for me to retain it. So, it was just a process or a method for me to study. And, sometimes I just listened to the tapes over and over again, just to make sure I got everything I needed to have.

I didn't know Braille at the time. I knew Braille, I knew basic Braille, and I knew how to use a slate and stylus, however I wasn't proficient enough, really, to take notes using those methods. So, that's why I chose to use a tape

recorder. One thing I did learn at the Orientation Center which really helped me throughout my career and still does today, is I took a typing class. And, by the time I got through my Master's degree program, I was a pretty darn good typer. (Laughter) And, I still use the keyboard today on my computer. I don't hunt and peck; I know where all the keys are because I was taught properly the way to type and that really has assisted me, as small as it may sound. It really is something, I mean, one of the things I took from the Orientation Center that really helped me get through my education and helped me get into my job; and helped me today to continue my job.

Clark: So, at the time that you were going through that education, computers were really not...

Reimers: That's right. Computers were in their infancy stages back in the early '80s. And, we had a computer room here at the Department, but the computers, I mean, compared to what they are now. I mean, there was no such thing as a lap top then as there is now. And, the talking software you used was very rudimentary, was very basic. And, to listen to it, I mean, it definitely required skill to be able to listen to it and use it proficiently; whereas now, the talking software packages are much easier to use, more understandable.

I use a talking package at work called Zoomtext, which I kind of grew up with. The school bought it way back in the early '90s. Actually, it could be used for students who are blind, and they tested it on me. I was their test case, which was fine, because I wanted something like that; and I liked it. And, they've improved it over the years, and I still use it.

And, it's just kind of what I've been using over all these years. And, it's not only a screen reading software package, but it also enlarges the text on the screen if I want to. I do enlarge the screen, but I don't use it that much. I use the reading software much more than trying to visualize; it's just more efficient that way.

Clark: Before you go on into, you know, your career following your college. You said it took you about a year before you decided to come into the Center.

Reimers: Correct.

Clark: Is there a reason that you can think of...?

Reimers: I think it was just fear of the unknown. I just didn't really know what to expect. I don't think I wanted to be labeled as a blind person at the time because like a lot of people I didn't, you know, I didn't think blind people could do a lot of things, and I guess, I just didn't want to carry that label around with me. I wanted it to be like it was, even though I knew that probably wasn't going to happen. But, during that year process I realized that I can't just sit here and do nothing all the time. I have to figure out something, and I thought the Orientation Center might be a way of finding out what it is. And, right from the get go, right from the first day, I felt pretty much at home at the Orientation Center, unless I could have understood their philosophy and what they stood for and why we did this and why we did that; as far as classes and field trips and projects and just all sorts of things.

You know, it made it a lot easier for me to...I don't think I ever would have applied for graduate school if I hadn't went through the Orientation Center. It gave me the confidence to do that, and then after that even go out and apply for jobs and interview and do those kind of things. So, it was a giant step forward for me, even though it took me a while to get that first step. It was something that I certainly do not regret, and would encourage anybody to do that. And, I know it's hard. I know that's the problem sometimes trying to get students in here. You know, for me it was just...I was ready for it; let's put it that way. I was definitely ready for a change, and was pleasantly surprised and liked the people I was with, and the instructors. It was just a good thing for me at that time.

Clark: Now, going back after you've had these experiences in the Orientation Center, building the confidence. If you look back to Orchard Place, would you still say that it was not a job that you think you could retain?

Reimers: That's kind of hard to answer. I would say it could be done, but the problem with Orchard Place, working at Orchard Place, is you're working with children who have emotional problems, and they can lash out at you at any time, and often did. You know, it involved disciplining the children, restraining at times, those kind of things. And, there were...the reason they didn't think I should stay there was that I could get hurt. I could get punched and never see it coming, or you know, those kinds of things.

Clark: Right.

Reimers: If I was working in the same capacity as I was in those days, I could see where I'd still be a liability. However, if I was a therapist, they have a whole team of therapists, psychologists and other workers there. I think it's certainly possible that I could go back, especially with a higher degree, even though my degree right now isn't in family therapy. If I decided to get a degree in family therapy, I don't see any reason why a blind person cannot work there as a therapist or in some other capacity; maybe not as a youth service worker. That might still be a problem.

14:45-15:30 (Interview briefly interrupted.)

Clark: Right. Okay, so you went through and you went to college after the Orientation Center.

Reimers: Right.

Clark: And then, was that then a degree in Counseling then that you received?

Reimers: It was a degree...actually degree...my diploma says education. It's a degree in education. I think that's because they didn't know where to put it. (Laughter) I think it's one of those deals. The degree, it was called the Job Development Job Placement Institute at the time, and it's kind of a little different thing. Its part of the Drake curriculum and Drake faculty staffed it, but it was totally paid for by the government. And, I think it was a way to try to get more people to work in the public sector, actually. It's a bit ironic because a lot of the people who graduated went and worked in the private sector, because they paid

more. (Laughter) And now, if you get that degree you have to actually commit to work two years in a public sector job, like, for the Department for the Blind or IVRS or something along that line. My job right now, where I work, is considered a public sector job, and I've been doing it for 23 years. So, I met their qualifications. (Laughter) But, I think that was the whole purpose of the degree.

What we learned in there were definitely job development skills, especially with employers convincing them why it's so important, hiring a person with a disability can be beneficial to them. Job placement, of course, would be working with the client themselves, or the person with the disability, and trying to get them into a job; and maybe showing them that they have the skills that they need. And, maybe they need an alternative way to do certain tasks to get that job. And, that was an important thing I also learned at the Orientation Center, that there are other ways to do things than, you know, the ways that you were used to by living in a sighted world. And, that was a very valuable thing I always thought.

Clark: So, you said you've been working at this job for twenty some years, right?

Reimers: Uh-huh.

Clark: When you started the job, again, they probably did not have the technology you have now.

Reimers: No.

Clark: How did you manage your case load at that time?

Reimers: Okay, I was hired at Des Moines area Community College in 1988. It was a new position that was created. Actually, they thought it would be more of a clerical position, but it really didn't turn out that way. It was grant funded at the time, a grant called Carl Perkins, which is a really large grant; it's a nation-wide grant. And, the specifics of the grant are...People who are funded by that grant work with people who are disabled or have English as a second language, or have extreme financial problems, those kind of things. So, when I was hired at DMACC I was to work with persons with disabilities. I was to work pretty much with students with disabilities and students, who were low income, students with English as a second language, that kind of population. So, when they interviewed candidates for that, all the candidates had Master's degrees, and they weren't quite sure what to do because they weren't expecting that at all. And, fortunately enough, they hired me and they did...They changed the job description a little bit.

But, to get back to your question, the first six years on my job until 1994 nobody had computers; we didn't even have them. And so, everything was done manually by paper by, you know, everything was just done; we definitely were not green in those days. For me, what I did was I had magnification tools to help me read. I got a CCTV, which made it a little easier for me to read letters and documents. I had magnifying glasses. I was in an office, fortunately, that had natural light. I was right next to a bank of windows, so I had a lot of light. But, I still used an overhead lamp that I could pivot around and put right behind me if I needed more light to see a document or anything. How I would work with students with resumes, was that I would

have them bring them to me in advance so that I could read them and make comments and so forth, so that when they came in they wouldn't spend all their time waiting for me to read their resume because it took so long. So, we tried planning it out in advance, and they would drop them off and they would come back maybe later. And, then we'd go over the resume together and so forth. So, in the beginning it was kind of tough, but it was a routine.

We processed a lot of job orders. In those days employers would contact us with job openings. And, what I would do is when I would get the information is, I would have a little hand-held tape recorder, and while I was talking to the employer on the phone I would repeat everything he said to me right into the tape recorder. And, the employers didn't know for the life of them, what I was doing. So, then I would just play that back. And, in those days we typed everything up in triplicate on those NCR things, and we'd put it in the typewriter. And, we had the old IBM Selectrics, and we'd just type up the job order, and then we'd send it off to the different departments by inner campus mail. And, if we had students or graduates registered with us, looking for full-time employment, we would make copies of that. And, we would actually mail them out to all of the graduates from each of the programs depending on what the job was.

You think about that today, what we do now, it makes it to do a job where, I mean, in 1988 it took probably, by the time you typed it up, typed up all the envelopes, you had to type the envelopes up and got it in the mail. It probably took a good half hour, 45 minutes just to do one job. Now, with email I can turn around and do a job in about two minutes. I can send it out, with the email distribution lists of all of our registered graduates, according to what program they

graduated in. Employers email jobs to us now. We just take those emails and send them right back out. So, within a couple of minutes our graduates have those in their hands. You know, computers have certainly made things a lot faster; a lot more green. They present their own problems, as it is, but...

Clark: Lot more efficient. (Laughter)

Reimers: Oh yes! I was just thinking about that the other day. I bet I did ten job orders in about a half hour just the other day, just sending them out and printing them out and, you know, just print out one job instead of printing out 25 or 30 that I'd have to send out to graduates. Now, you can just forward on an email to them all at once with one email; so much easier. And, they can respond back to me just as quickly. A lot of times I hear back on the same day whether they got the job, or whether or not they're going to apply for it. It's just unbelievable the turn around.

So, for the first six years at DMACC things kind of putzed along, and even when we got computers they were pretty, they weren't the speediest things in the world. They weren't as efficient as today's; they weren't as fast. They don't do as much as we have today, but it was a step. And, we could access data bases. And, you know, the web wasn't even born yet, I don't think, in 1994. (Laughter) You couldn't access the web or anything.

Clark: Right.

Reimers: Because they didn't have PCs. We were all online with the mainframe. And, then they started coming out with,

kind of, individual PCs for everybody. Then you could access the web, and you could go to employers' web sites, and look up jobs and find out more what they're about. And, we had to use tools in the early days that you probably don't use much any more. I still use the CCTV, however. I have one right next to my computer that I use occasionally if I do have a student who walks in and wants a resume looked at. I can put it under my CCTV and look at it. Sometimes I just read documents, intercampus documents that have been sent over to me. Sometimes it's just as fast to read it that way than it is to try to scan it into my computer and read it. It depends on the length of the document. If it's a one page document, I'll just read it under my CCTV. If it's a longer document, I'll scan it in and then I'll read it that way; it's a little more efficient.

Clark: Do you ever conduct classes on writing resumes?

Reimers: Yes, I do. At DMACC we have a series of classes called pre-employment classes. Some of our programs out there are required to take those; some are not. But, what they learn in these classes are resume writing, interviewing skills. They write portfolios, those kinds of things, job seeking skills. And, we often go and talk to those classes about resume writing; what should be in a resume what shouldn't, type of resume you should use that kind of thing. And, they also bring their classes over to our offices. We'll tell them about those things and our services.

And, one of the big things we do, especially in the spring time, are mock interviews with these students. And, we try to make it as real as possible, and they're supposed to dress up and treat it like the real deal. We treat them like

the real deal, so it's not a casual conversation; it's an interview. And, sometimes interviews can be casual but for the most part we're trying to find out as much information about them as we can in a short amount of time. So, we do...To answer your question, we do go out and we do talk to classes quite often about resume writing, about interviewing, searching for jobs anything job related we'll do that.

Clark: So, on a personal note, how did you and Toni meet each other?

Reimers: Actually, we met at Orchard Place when I was working there. We knew each other and dated each other before I was blind. And so, she's been all through this process with me, the laser treatments, the Vitrectomies the whole thing; the Orientation Center. She encouraged me to go in to the Orientation Center, but I was kind of hesitant at the time, you know, like I said, for at least a year before I went in. And, she was pretty happy when I decided to. We both thought, she thought it was a pretty good idea to do that. And, that's how it worked out for us; worked out pretty good.

We got married, actually, while I was in graduate school. I always kid her and I always laugh, had to study on my honeymoon. But, we had to take kind of a short honeymoon because that was in the fall semester, my first semester. So, it was more like a long weekend than anything else. Actually, we got engaged while I was still in the Orientation Center, on Valentines Day. And, then I graduated in June and we had that summer. But, we couldn't get married that summer because the church we

got married at didn't have any openings, not till October. (Laughter) Yeah, we had to wait. So, we got married in October, and it's always kind of fun to come back to the alumni banquets, because the alumni banquet is usually on, or right around, our anniversary. And that's kind of fun. It's kind of a fun way to celebrate, and you can see all the people you knew in the Orientation Center, and the instructors and the staff and everybody. So, in a nutshell that's how we met. We've been together, we will have been married, well, it will have been 25 years this fall. Toni always says we've been together 28 years, so I have to go by that. (Laughter)

Clark: And, now she's working here.

Reimers: That's right, and I take credit for that. An opening came up and I inquired about it. And, I think that everybody thought that I was going to apply for it and then Toni applied for it. That, I think, kind of shocked everybody. But, she's been here eleven years now, and really likes what she does and likes the people she works with. So, yeah, kind of what goes around comes around I guess.

Clark: So, what kind of things do you like to do for relaxation?

Reimers: Well, I've always been into music. I like music. I like just listening to music. I like going to concerts. Those are things I like to do. I like to be outside. My parents have a lake home over by Lake Panorama, and I like to just go over there and sit outside, be by the lake. As a kid growing up my family always had boats, so I used to water ski a lot,

go boating, those kind of things. I ski quite a bit down in Beulah's place when I was in the Orientation Center. We went there a couple of times, I think, at their lake house down there and did some water skiing. So, that's one thing that helps you to relax, I guess, is those two things, music, being outside and being by the water. We're big Okoboji fans. We try to go every year and spend some time up there.

Clark: You ever go to Triggs up there?

Reimers: I know where it is. I never stayed there, but is that where you guys go?

Clark: That's where...We went there a couple of years with our families, yeah.

30:00

Reimers: We stayed at a place called Fillenwarth Beach, which is right next to Ellis Park. That's when you get the whole...As a kid growing up my parents took us up there. I mean, we're talking about the early '60s, now, for vacations. And, we stayed at a place called Vacation Village, which is now called Village West around the lake. And, we went there for years, and years, and years; even up through the first couple years of college. We'd go back there and then we kind of got away from that; kind of got away from going up there for a while. And, then when Toni and I were dating I said, "Let's go up there and see if we can find a place;" and we started going to this Fillenwarth Beach. And, we went there a few times, and then for the last five years my family said, "Hey, we'll go up there, too." We rented a cabin at this

Fillenwarth Beach and stayed for about a week, and just enjoyed being around the lake and all the activities up there, there is to do; a lot of things to do and lot of places to shop. That's what Toni likes to do. (Laughter) Toni and my Mom went to an antique shop and they were gone for a long time; that's okay. I guess those are the things I like to do to relax, be with family, and be outside, and be by the lake, and listen to a lot of music. I have a huge CD selection, which when, someday when I have to move, is going to be a real pain. But, I have a lot of music in my library.

Clark: Well, that's good. A lot of different kinds of music or do you like...

Reimers: Well, I kind of...As a product of the '70s, I kind of grew up listening to rock and roll. And, then in high school I got involved with the school jazz band. And, I was a trombone player in those days, and I played for the school jazz band and really got into jazz for a long time, and still am into jazz. I still like jazz. And, I'd say most of my collection, probably, is what that is; is jazz. I like all kinds of music. There's a few things I don't particularly like, but for the most I like all kinds of different music. So, those are the primary things. I'm one of the disco child era. I grew up in the disco era in the '70s, although I don't have any disco albums. But, the music sometimes is fun to listen to because you can always find it on these '70s rock and roll stations. And, it brings back memories of the discos. They were all over campus when I was in college, so you couldn't help but go to one once in a while. (Laughter)

Clark: So, as far as transportation, have you had problems with transportation, or have you been able to work that out very well?

Reimers: I've been fortunate. When I got hired at DMACC, back in 1988, the person that hired me was a very progressive person, who kind of made sure my needs got met. And, she even, when they decided to hire me, she made arrangements for somebody who lived fairly close to me to pick me up and bring me out to work. And, I would pay her a certain amount of money per week for gas, and she would just pick me up and worked out fine. And, then this person moved clear over to the south side, and so that didn't work anymore. But, as a result of that, there were two or three other people who volunteered to pick me up. And, they never asked for gas money from me, which is great. I offer and they don't take it. I have two or three different drivers who I can depend on, who will bring me out to work, and they all live pretty close to me, within probably a mile. And so, I've been very fortunate. I've always had transportation out to work and back. And, I work clear out in Ankeny, and I live in Des Moines, so it's a good ten twelve miles out there and back. And so, I've been pretty lucky with that. Every once in a while I get into a bind, but other than that it's been great. One of my drivers, I said, "I need to come here today." He said, "No problem." So, he just dropped me down here, and that was it.

So, yeah, transportation has not been a problem for me. I know I'm lucky in that regard. I know transportation can be a huge issue. When I was in graduate school, I used to walk to class every day. We didn't live far from Drake at that time, but probably a mile and a half two miles. I only

took the bus whenever the weather was bad. I depended on my two feet back in those days. So, yeah, transportation out to work and back has been good for me. I've been very lucky, can't emphasize that enough, that these people are willing to do that. And, they all work in the same building I do, which is nice, too. So, they don't have to go anywhere out of their way once we get on campus. Ankeny campus has grown so much over the years. Seem to be quite big. So, it's worked out good, worked out very well.

Clark: And, sometimes I think, going through the Orientation Center like you did, and I think you mentioned this earlier, that you look at alternatives. How can I do the same thing a different way?

Reimers: Well, and there was times I thought about taking a cab out to work if push came to shove, and I didn't have any way to get there, you know. It's something, certainly, I didn't want to do every day, pretty expensive, but, you know, if I had to I would do that. There is a bus that runs out there. It's not the most convenient for me. It can be done. I have to go downtown and transfer and then go up to Urban campus and transfer again, and then come on out to Ankeny. And, it would probably take a good hour to do that, but it can be done. One of the things that, I guess, I'm kind of particularly proud of, is that when I first started at DMACC they didn't have any bus service out there; and now we do. And, I was on a committee that back in those days that did things to try to make the campus more accessible. And, that was one of the things we did, was to get busses to come out to DMACC. And, now we actually have actual MT bus stops out there, covered bus stops like the ones you see

downtown. And, they come out every day at least twice. So, it can be done and that's a good thing.

Clark: Do they come right onto the campus?

Reimers: They do. They don't go to each building. DMACC is kind of, it's a group of buildings that has kind of a big circular drive that goes all the way around. And, I call it the half moon. It starts out on Highway 69 and goes all the way around in a circle down Oralabor Road, and that's where the bus stops are at, and they're on that road. That road is not far from any building you can get to it very easily. The Para-transit bus will come out as well, and they will go to a particular building if asked to. We often see them pick up students at our student center, which is where the book store is, and the snack bar, and the student activities office is, and so forth. They pick up a lot of students there, students who may be in a wheel chair or have some other disability that makes it hard for them to get on a regular bus. So, one of the things that committee did was make sure the busses ran out there. And, we thought that was a good thing. I never actually took one, but we wanted to make sure our students had access to them. (Laughter)

Clark: Right.

Reimers: And, I don't know, I couldn't tell you how many of our faculty ride the busses or not. It would be interesting to know if they do. It would be interesting. I ought to think about putting together a study, and try to find that out; see if our faculty and staff use the busses as well as the students.

Clark: As far as travel goes, do you have any problems getting around campus or anything like that?

Reimers: No, I use my cane. I have, I don't have it right now. Toni just took it, but I have a cane which I use when I go building to building. I don't use it too much in my own building. There I don't go anywhere. When I do, I go back to the copier or the printer and that's about all I go, besides the rest rooms and the break room. And, that's all within about 20 feet of my desk, so I don't tend to use it as much as I do. Whenever I leave the building I take it with me. And, if I'm going to a building to speak to a class, or going up to the student center to get lunch or do something, I always take it with me. I think that's just a good practice to get into.

Clark: Yes. I imagine with your crutches and cane and everything it's a little bit harder.

Reimers: I can't really use my cane with my crutches. Yeah, that's been a problem with the crutches, but hopefully that's just a temporary thing. One thing I discovered over the years is that more students are aware of blindness, and they now...When I first started at DMACC, they used to ask me what that white stick was for. And, now they know. They know what it's for. And, the students overall, I think are, kids I call them, are just much more aware than they used to be. I don't know if you can blame that on the internet or blame that on the way it is today, or the information highway so much more expanded than it was when I was that age; that you have access to more information. I think, sometimes in the high schools they get what they call sensitivity training, those kind of things.

That's kind of a nice transition to realize that students know why you have that cane and why you're using it.

Clark: I think in the elementary schools now too, like they have speaking engagements you know, students from here go out on speaking engagements. I don't know if they did that when you were a student in the center.

Reimers: I didn't go to a school, well, I did go to a school, one elementary school once. But, actually, when I was at DMACC we went out to some high schools. It was part of that committee I was talking about. And, we went to Urbandale High School several times. I'm trying to think of any other schools we went to. I think just Urbandale at the time. They needed it bad! (Laughter) We went out there a couple of times and talked to the students.

Clark: Why did you say they needed it bad? (Laughter)

Reimers: Well, I don't want to bad mouth Urbandale or anything, but they're a little secluded out there. And, I don't know.

Clark: They had a different attitude?

Reimers: They have a different attitude towards not just people with disabilities, but any kind of a minority, I guess. That's just my opinion. I think maybe you should edit this tape.

Clark: Well, you'll have the opportunity to edit it. (Laughter)

Reimers: But, we just felt at the time it was a good place to start. You know, it was an all white school for the most part, and busses didn't run out there at the time. I don't know if they do or not. So, people with disabilities wouldn't live out there, I mean, because they couldn't get around as well. So, the people that did live there had no clue what people with disabilities were like, because they didn't have anybody living anywhere near that had one, or if they did they probably never came out of their house. So, it was a little different. And, I don't know if Urbandale is still like that or not, but back in the '80s and early '90s it was kind of its own little world out there. You live in Ankeny, how do people in Ankeny react to? I always thought Ankeny was kind of the same way.

Clark: Actually not. I go to Our Lady's Immaculate Heart Church in Ankeny. I've always walked when the weather was nice. I've always walked down there, which is about a mile from where I live. And, just recently since I retired I have been lecturing, I have been a lector at church, and just very well received. I feel very comfortable. People in general are just...

Reimers: I think it's just awareness then.

Clark: Yes.

Reimers: I think people are just more aware now than they were. Maybe ADA, passing the ADA might have helped that some; I don't know. It certainly opened up a lot of employers' eyes, that's for sure.

Clark: Yeah.

Reimers: That's a whole different interesting phenomenon. I could go on a long time about ADA. (Laughter)

Clark: What about it? What about...

Reimers: Well, when the ADA passed...What I remember about the ADA is the day it passed, was when Ted Koppel was still on the air. Night Line, is that what they call that show? And, they did a big show on ADA. And, they showed a private contractor how he was going to make his crane accessible for a person with a disability. (Laughter) They didn't understand the term, reasonable accommodation at the time. And, I thought, "Oh no, this is not good!" (Laughter) And, it seemed like in the beginning a lot of employers would try to find ways out of not hiring people with disabilities. And, they'd hire lawyers to come up with ways to write job descriptions so that they could figure out a way not to hire people with disabilities. And, it was real interesting to see some of these job descriptions. I would get a job description for a part-time secretary that was five or six pages long, and it was, like, what in the world! And, they had all these different clauses and all these different, you know, and it was just a way to try to get out of it.

45:00

Reimers: I said, "You know, they're spending so much money on these lawyers, wouldn't it be cheaper to hire somebody and make an accommodation, than to pay a lawyer all this money to write these job descriptions?" But,

they did it. And, large companies, small, everybody did it; anybody that could afford a lawyer did it.

That settled down, and I think once people realized, really, what the ADA was about, and the purpose of it, I think that settled down somewhat. And, we don't see that nearly as much now as we used to. And, the ADA has been around for, what is it, 20 years; and it was billed as a reactive bill. I mean, people reacted to it, and it will always change to kind of...It often changed a few times over the years to accommodate those reactions that people had to it. It was a pretty smart thing they did and they actually wrote...When Harkin and his staff and whoever wrote that decided to make it kind of a reactive, more of a bill so that they could leave some leeway in it; so they can react to it to what people thought of it, and what people were doing. So, it was an interesting process to watch over the years.

Now, it's not such a big deal. Matter of fact, this afternoon before I came here for this interview I had a...I'm on the Affirmative Action Committee of DMAACC. And, we have a whole Affirmative Action Policy that we review every couple of years, and today was the day. And, it's amazing how they kind of bend over backwards to make sure they don't discriminate against anybody. I mean, they're really...And, matter of fact, they're encouraging more people from the Department for the Blind and IVR...They're trying to get more people from those agencies to get people to apply at DMAACC. They're really making an effort to try to recruit those people, which is something you never used to see.

Clark: Right.

Reimers: And, it's just amazing. You know, I think as a result of ADA. I think that's a result of people just being more aware and people just, you know, this is the right thing to do kind of attitude. I think that attitudes have changed somewhat, and I suppose there's a lot of reasons why. But, it's a good thing; it really is. I was pretty proud of our school after that meeting today because I really thought that they really are making an effort to hire more; not only people with disabilities, but different minority classes, and so forth.

Clark: What kind of positions are they talking about?

Reimers: Well, we hire...We have seven different categories. It starts out with basic service all the way up to faculty, and all the way up through provost, presidents, and vice presidents, I mean, all the way to the top. So, it kind of depends on...And, they came to the conclusion today, we have a contract. DMACC has a contract with IVRS and the Department for the Blind to try to get more people to apply for jobs. But, I think the problem is that maybe, some of the clients over the past couple of years aren't applying for those positions because the jobs don't really match what they can do. With the enrollment going up so much over the past three or four years we've really had to hire a lot of adjunct faculty teachers, a lot of instructors. And, you have to have a fairly high degree of education to teach, at least a Master's degree to teach at a community college. And, I could be wrong. I'm assuming that a lot of our clients probably don't have Master's degrees or want to teach, for that matter. And, that could be an assumption on my part, but that's just what I'm feeling. We're not hiring a lot of people in our service positions, or in our administrative staff,

like our secretarial positions. It's because our turnover rate is so low and we haven't had that need. So, I'm hoping I'm going to be talking to some people here and at IVR, try to pep talk them a little bit and try to get more clients, their clients to apply out here for positions that they qualify for and that can be whatever. So, that's what we're hoping for. We can get...There's one category we do lack in, is hiring people with disabilities all across the board for all our positions. And, part of that is because of the population we live in. Part of that is trying to get applicants to apply, and we haven't had much luck doing that. So, maybe we need to step up our recruiting efforts. We're going to work on it.

Clark: Sounds good. Is there anything else that you wanted to include yet?

Reimers: No I'm not...I guess, I'm not sure what exactly it is, I mean, what you're looking for. I don't know what the purpose is.

Clark: Mostly looking for just kind of your journey, like that you've shared how you got to where you are now and your involvement in your work, and those kinds of things.

Reimers: Okay.

Clark: I'm trying to think, too, if there's anything that I'm missing here.

Reimers: I will say, to digress a little bit, go back a little bit; that one of my favorite classes during the Orientation Center, and a class probably I learned the most from, was

the Business class. It was fascinating for me to sit through that. And, at that time it was Jim Witte and Creig Slayton teaching that class, and they were very good, very good; obviously knew what they were doing. (Laughter) And, kind of an eye opener for me; I learned a lot of things. And, one of the things I learned was to treat people like they would want to be treated. Sometimes people with disabilities, I think, they expect too much. They expect this and they expect that, and I don't think that's a good way to look at life, especially if you're employed. So, one thing I try to do when I talk to faculty and students and other staff, is just be myself. My thing is, if I can make people feel comfortable around me and my disability, then that's, you've won the battle I think.

Clark: I agree with you on that.

Reimers: I just think that if you can earn their trust in that way, you know, I've had this faculty up there I've known all 23 years. And, when they first find out who I am and what I'm about, and that blindness isn't an issue, it's just there, it's just one of the things about me. Then they kind of forget about it, I think, and I just, you know, seem like one of the buddies. (Laughter) And, that's important, I think, to kind of establish that relationship with fellow co-workers and family, and a lot of the faculty I just converse with over the phone. I hardly ever see them, but it gets to the point now where I call and they recognize my voice and chat for a while and talk. It's no secret I'm a huge Iowa State fan, and unfortunately, I work in a world of Iowa fans. So, they give me a hard time and I give them a hard time, and we have fun with it. And, you know, it's just like anything else. That, to

me, is really important. And, that's something I learned I think, from being in the Business class. They made that point in a lot of different ways in that class, and you had to kind of pay attention and pick up on that stuff. And, to me, that was real important. That was a class I looked forward to every day. Most every day was Business class, and it seemed like a valuable lesson to me.

Clark: It could have helped you to change your mind set?

Reimers: I would say so. Just the whole Orientation experience changed my mind set. I mean, from somebody who was kind of scared and kind of didn't know what he wanted to do, and what can I do kind of an attitude. You know, what can I do now kind of attitude, to well, I can do this; I can do that. You know, I don't know if they still have this saying around here, but the saying then was a class is a class.

Clark: Right.

Reimers: And, you can learn anything any time anywhere was the way I took that. And, I think that's one reason why we did all the field trips. And, you know, you can learn about your blindness picking apples out of an apple orchard, or the camping thing was; that was the best thing, (Laughter) because everybody was kind of petrified about that whole experience. Did you go with us? You probably don't remember at this point in time.

Clark: I think I did.

Reimers: After everything got set up it was just...oh, we had to set up in the rain I think. It was just pouring down rain and the students were all whining, "I don't want to stay," but the rain stopped and it got real nice, and it was fun. We were right next to a stream and, you know, it was great. That was a Business class right there, that whole thing. And that's, you know, you learn something from that. I think that's why the class is a class motto is there, and it's a good motto to live by. They still use that? They still have that here?

Clark: Yes. You hear that often, a class is a class. Especially when students question why do we go on this field trip?

Reimers: Why are we doing this?

Clark: Yes, why are we taking time out from our class?
(Laughter)

Reimers: Yeah, I think people come in here thinking okay, I'm going to learn to be a wood worker, or I'm going to learn to be a typist. That's not what that's all about; and you learn that. For me, I learned that pretty quick. Well, within a week or so I learned. I'm not here to learn how to be a wood worker, I don't' want to be a wood worker anyway. That's not my thing, or typing, or any of those. Cooking, I didn't want to be a chef, you know. But, you figure out why you do those things, and what you're supposed to get out of it. And, it makes it a lot easier.

Clark: You ever have a class where you felt like you really had to address fear?

Reimers: Oh god, cane travel. (Laughter) I'm still not a very good traveler. Yeah, I didn't like...It took me a long time to get used to cane travel. When I walked around the block for the first time, that was, like, a major victory for me. I was like oh yeah, I did it! And, I admit I realized that one of these days I'm going to be walking all across town. I better get used to that idea. (Laughter) And, I took it this way. Sometimes it was kind of funny, cane travel, because I can remember one time specifically. I was walking along and it was a sunny day, and I knew which direction I was going because the sun was in my face. And, I could hear the traffic and everything, and I thought this is going well; this is going good. And, I was tapping and I was going along, and all of a sudden this guy pulls up next to me in a car and he goes, "Do you know you're walking right down the middle of Grand Avenue?" (Laughter) And, this guy shattered me right there. How did I get in the middle of the street?

Clark: I led the traffic up Fourth Street. (Laughter)

Reimers: I was in a parade, come on! (Laughter) So, I looked at it. I kind of turned it into from a fear thing to kind of a adventure kind of thing. And, once I got out, it's one of those things where if you do it more and more, you just learn more and more and get more accustomed to it. And, that's the way it was for me, I think. And, I was in a little unusual situation when I first started, because I don't know if you remember or not, but I mentioned I...When we came on board they were redoing the kitchen.

Clark: Oh yes.

Reimers: And, Dave asked Mitch and I if we'd help out with that. And, we were, gosh, for a while we spent all day up there. We didn't even go to class. We were helping them put cabinets in and we were finishing them and doing all that kind of stuff. And, I remember I didn't even start my shop project until I'd been here like three months, three or four months, because we were upstairs all the time doing that, which was a pretty good experience in itself, too. So, I was a little behind in everything, including cane travel. And, because a lot of the students kind of had, kind of, a head start on. But, we got through it all right.

That was probably my worst fear to start with, was cane travel. The cooking wasn't too bad. It was a little at first being around a hot stove, but I never cooked to begin with anyway, so it was all new to me. (Laughter) I did fine. I got through my seven courses, no problem. And, I think it turned out good. Nobody complained anyway, so that was good. It was a good experience; wouldn't trade it for anything. Certainly recommend a lot of students go through it, if they can, or a lot of clients go through it. Like I said earlier, what you got to realize is, the problem getting them in here, I think. Hopefully, once they get here, I think, they realize it's all right.

Clark: Yes. I don't know if it's the same with you, but me, I think back if I would have done that earlier, I would have saved myself some grief. (Laughter)

Reimers: Gone to the Orientation Center?

Clark: Yeah, because I put it off for years and when I look back I think, oh golly, I would have saved myself a lot.

1:00:00

Reimers: What years did you go through then?

Clark: I went through in '83, '84.

Reimers: Just before me.

Clark: Yes.

Reimers: A lot of people are gone now have retired, isn't it something else?

Clark: Right. Well, thank you for sharing your experiences.

Reimers: Well, I hope that was what you were looking for. I wasn't quite sure where to go with it.

Clark: Basically, every person has, everyone has their own story.

Reimers: I'm sure.

Clark: And, yours is, you know, with working for Orchard Place and then realizing that's not going to work. And, sometimes you hit rock bottom, and then you have to take a look and say okay, I can't live this way forever, you know, and start picking up the pieces.

Reimers: Well, they canceled all my soap operas; there's nothing left to watch. (Laughter) They take them all off the air. I think that's a common story, though. I think a lot of people kind of go through similar situations if they lose their sight. And, then they kind of hit a real low point, and they just try to figure out what can I do; what am I going to do? And, I think it takes some people a short amount of time to figure that out, some people a lot longer.

Clark: Right.

Reimers: Just a matter of duration rather than, once they take that first step, I think, it really...It's a life changer.

Clark: Yes. Well, thank you, Dave. That was really good.

1:01:53

(End of Recording)

Beverly Tietz

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